



An unfamiliar location for 'Camelot' at the Severn Valley Railway. Photo: David Cable

# The Bluebell Times

A Newsletter for Bluebell Railway Members, Staff and Supporters

October 2025

## IN THIS ISSUE

Over the years, the pages of *Bluebell News* and *The Bluebell Times* have carried many reports about the engineering required to maintain and run our Railway. This year alone we have seen Platform 1 at Horsted Keynes bought up to full passenger standard, a gargantuan project requiring paying careful attention to foundations, walls, alignments, surfaces and so on. But have you ever considered the flowerbeds? I must admit I never had, somehow imagining that such details were simply "there". The truth of course is very different: these things require care and maintenance just as do our locos, carriages and infrastructure. (Though I suspect without the safety-critical element, give or take a few sharp rose thorns!)

The Railway exists to preserve a transport system, but it is not really a transport business, but an attraction. We only survive because we provide an attractive environment to visit. That can mean the intangibles: the smell of warm oil, steam drifting between carriages as they warm in the platform, the gradual crescendo of action on the footplate as departure time nears. But it also includes the things to look at between the trains: a well-tended flower bed, or an elegant station clock. From time to time, our success is recognised in public accolades, such as the recent award of Sussex Attraction of the Year at the Sussex Business Awards.

So if you wish to get up at the crack of dawn to shovel ash from a pit on a damp autumn morning, or you have the aptitude to renovate a dilapidated carriage, then we have a volunteer role for you. But equally, if you have (improved engine) green fingers and know the difference between annual and perennial – then there is a probably a warm welcome and satisfying role too!

Tom James, Editor

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# Watts Occurring

By Roy Watts, BRPS Chairman

Clearly autumn is upon us as the days slowly draw to an earlier close and the words "steam heat" appear on the traffic notices.

I will always admit that autumn on the Railway is my favourite time. There is a certain aura that transcends the line such as the autumn hues in the adjacent fields, the proliferation of steam, the strong aroma of warm paraffin and the softness of lighting. Such are the characteristics that really do express that bygone era we want to portray.

It also means that the most important quarter of the year for revenue is rapidly approaching. Now, a couple of obvious points to note here. With the number of years we have covered our late autumn and festive services, we should be so well versed in what we do. If we get it wrong, we only have ourselves to blame and why change products that have proven successful – the old "if it ain't broke, don't fix" syndrome. We should only learn from the previous and improve or enhance, ensuring subtle differences are noted and above all, add value without adding complication.

We still have a couple of big events coming up to focus on before the Festive season kicks in but first, a quick look back at the late summer. Finance Director Chris Welch was able to report summer holiday traffic had been particularly successful this year and we had seen growth in visitor numbers and also with filming and charters such as the recent visit by the Belmond Pullman on a Louis Vuitton special. As I write Horsted Keynes appears to have become "Tyndrum" some 500 miles away set in rather rugged terrain!

We had another very successful Beer Festival clearly well organised and a firm calendar date fixture listing for aficionados who clearly appreciate the steam – beer – good food and music combination. An example of an event where new and subtle additions such as the inclusion of Kingscote station into the proceedings added that piece of extra interest.

It was even noted how well the late evening trains were used, a considerable number of people using the service to access the Southern network – the exact purpose of building the extension and one that requires much more exploitation which we hope will develop with our partnership with GTR.

Yes, we have come a long way over the years, our commercial team seeking new and innovative ways of building, encouraging and expanding the business portfolio without destroying the main ethos of why we are here.

As can be seen here and elsewhere, other railways have a similar approach and if anyone has an idea – out of the box or otherwise – then do let us know for due consideration.

Remember, it must be practical.

Just to give you a heads up that advance sales for this year's [Giants of Steam](#) are already well advance and we only now need "Tornado" to complete the quartet of new build steam to what promises to be a great event.

Halloween and the [Ghost Train](#) bringing a new and shall I say, "creepy" innovative creation to the Railway experience is doing very well and is already being considered for additional services in 2026.

Finally, the Festive services both seasonal and catering, are also selling with many dates already sold through and we are only in early October.

As always, my plea for any help people can give during these all-important months is here again but I stress that you will be warmly welcomed and being the time of year, you will have a really enjoyable time so thank you in advance, much appreciated as always.

We must acknowledge all those crews and engineering teams who have been supporting our roving ambassadors – 65, Stepney, Fenchurch, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Camelot and E6040 on their



recent sojourns to other Railways, participating in respective events and galas.

A very pleasing predicament to be in so well done all those concerned.

Lastly as I write, news has filtered through that the Bluebell Railway has won the Best Attraction in Sussex award 2025 at the Sussex Business Awards.

A nice point to conclude on.

Well done everyone concerned, great recognition of the herculean efforts that go into making these achievements possible. Team work at its best.



# 2026 DATES CONFIRMED

*MORE TO BE CONFIRMED IN DUE COURSE*



**SPRING STEAM GALA**

*20-22 MARCH*

**BLUEBELL DIESEL GALA**

*4-6 SEPTEMBER*

**MODEL RAILWAY WEEKEND**

*27-28 JUNE*

**GIANTS OF STEAM 2026**

*16-18 OCTOBER*



# Q Class 541 and Schools Class *Stowe*

By Steve Pilcher and Chris Hunford, Maunsell Locomotive Society

There are some significant developments with Schools class 928 '*Stowe*' and with Q class 541, which are going to be announced in the next [Maunsell Locomotive Society](#) Members' Newsletter – which is due out later this month. These will be covered in the November issue of *The Bluebell Times*.

Suffice to say that progress continues with the overhaul of Q class 541, both at Leaky Finders' premises in Devon and at Sheffield Park.

One development has been that the superheater header is due back shortly after repairs by a specialist contractor. Our volunteers have also got stuck in to the unglamorous task of cleaning and painting the inside of 541's new tender tank; they are already about two thirds the way through cleaning and painting in the first coat of primer.

We would like to thank the various workshop staff who have been working on the tender brake rigging and pipework, along with workshop volunteers who have been helping paint the underside and other components.



*Tender chassis (left) and brake cylinders (below).*

*Both photos: Steve Pilcher*



# First Aid Training

By Steve Hall, Leading Porter (SP) and RMB Leading Steward

On 15 September 2025, ten Bluebell Railway staff attended a British Red Cross – Emergency First Aid at Work course in the Birch Grove Suite at Sheffield Park.

The one-day course covered skills such as CPR and use of a defibrillator, treating choking, bleeding, shock, burns and seizures, along with accident reporting and COSHH awareness.

Those attending are now qualified as first aiders on the railway — a valuable skillset that could make all the difference in an emergency.





# The Platform Clock from Slinfold Station

By Malcolm Johnson, Museum Curator

Visitors to Sheffield Park station may notice a new arrival on Platform 1: a handsome 19<sup>th</sup>-century platform clock, now fully in use thanks to a generous donation.

For many years the station's platform clock had been incomplete. In the 1990s its original mechanism was stolen, and it was replaced with a simple battery-powered movement. This summer, however, the Bluebell Railway Museum was fortunate to receive a fine replacement — a clock made by William Webster, one of Britain's most respected clockmakers.

## THE WEBSTER LEGACY

William Webster was apprenticed to the great Thomas Tompion and opened his own business in London's Exchange Alley in 1711. The Webster family went on to produce clocks for nearly two centuries, creating longcase and bracket clocks of the highest quality, and establishing a reputation that endures today.

## A RAILWAY HISTORY

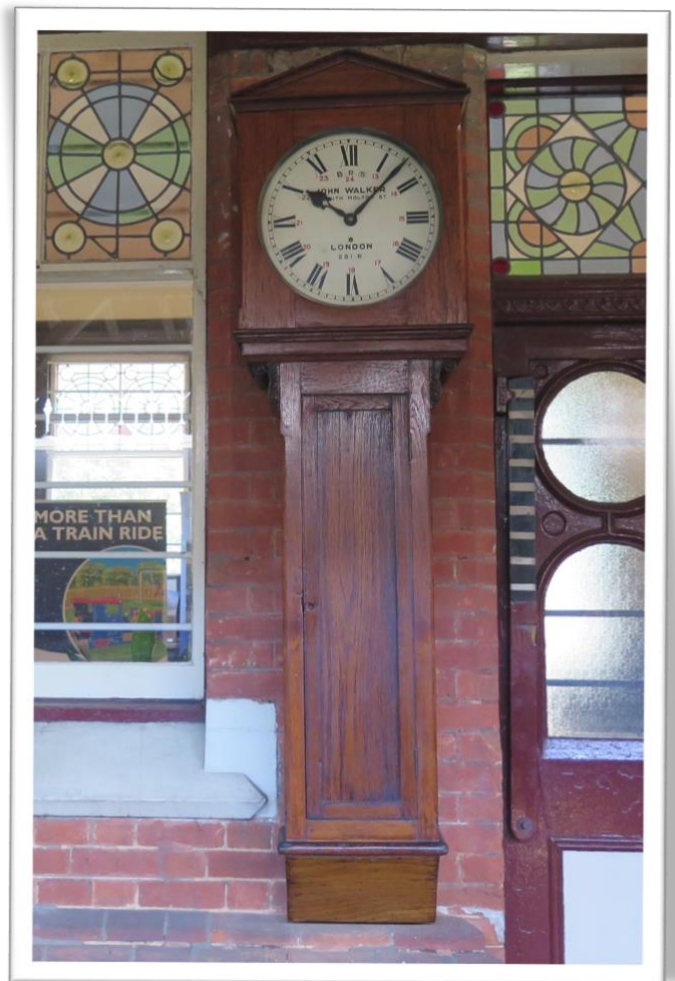
The story of our new clock begins in November 1865, when the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway purchased it from the London clockmaker and supplier John Walker for £17-10s-0d. It was installed on the platform at Slinfold Station, where it can be seen in photographs of the time.

Later the clock was moved to Staines Station, before being sold by British Railways to Mr. Vivian Bairstow on 5 March 1982 for £225. Over forty years later, Mr. Bairstow has kindly donated the clock to the Bluebell Railway Trust, allowing it to take pride of place at Sheffield Park Station.

## A PIECE OF BLUEBELL HISTORY FOR YOU

In turn, this gift means we now have a redundant clock case from Sheffield Park Station available. Although it no longer contains its original movement — only the case survives — it remains a working and attractive timepiece that has been part of the station's fabric for at least half a century.

It is being offered in return for a donation to the Bluebell Railway Trust, with proceeds granted to the Bluebell Railway PLC. For anyone wishing to own a genuine piece of Bluebell Railway history, this is a rare opportunity. Please contact Malcolm Johnson at [malcolm.johnson@bluebell-railway.com](mailto:malcolm.johnson@bluebell-railway.com).



# Project Thumper

Information from [Network Rail](#)

## TACKLING LANDSLIPS BEFORE THEY HAPPEN

Landslips – where loose pieces of earth and rock slide onto the tracks – are a growing challenge. Climate change means we’re facing increasingly heavy and long-lasting rain – making landslips all the more likely.

Landslips can cause delays, speed restrictions or even line closures. In fact, landslips caused 319,703 minutes of delays to trains and freight between 2019 and 2024 in the southern region of England alone.

The Tonbridge to Hastings line in East Sussex is particularly vulnerable to landslips. This is because the line was built on especially unstable clay – called Wadhurst Clay – during the Victorian times. This line has had more earthworks failures in the past 20 years than any other in the area.

That’s why we’ve launched Project Thumper – the Tonbridge to Hastings undrained earthwork and modernisation programme and engineering research project. It will help us learn more about the unique issues the line faces – so we can develop and test new solutions to help keep you moving.

## FIXING ISSUES BEFORE THEY BECOME A PROBLEM

We’ve already had big wins thanks to this project. We’ve found more than 400 previously unrecorded issues thanks to a new detailed digital model of the route we created. The model is made up of historical records, ground investigations and advanced LiDAR scanning – a type of laser scanner that can survey our routes.

We’re using the model to help us understand where the risks are highest on the line. We can now proactively work through these issues in order of importance and fix them before they affect your journeys.

## COLLABORATING WITH A HERITAGE RAILWAY LINE

We’re also collaborating with a heritage railway nearby to carry out vital and innovative testing to prevent landslips. The location of Bluebell Railway means it runs on much of the same clay. Plus, its slower train speeds and easier access make it ideal for testing new approaches to preventing landslips.

So with contractor Atkins Realis we’re testing monitoring tools that can help us assess how stable slopes are without digging or disruption.

We’ll continue monitoring and testing at Bluebell Railway for the rest of the year, covering summer and winter conditions.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

The insights we’re gaining from this work are helping us understand how and when landslips occur – and how to stop them before they do. It’s delivered £34,831 in efficiencies so far, and the data gathered will help shape future resilience planning across our Southern region.

We hope the learnings will help us better predict and prevent landslips on other busy commuter and freight routes as well. This means better planning, fewer emergency repairs and a more reliable service for you and freight.

And it’s not just about landslips. This partnership is part of a wider push to make the railway more resilient to all kinds of challenges – from extreme weather to infrastructure wear and tear. It’s an important part of our greener railway strategy, which aims to deliver a railway that’s fit for the future, cares for the environment and helps communities thrive.

Derek Butcher, a principal geotechnical engineer at Network Rail, said: “With the right data and the right partnerships, we can move from reacting to landslips to preventing them altogether. That’s better for passengers, better for the environment, and better for the railway.”



# Gardening at Horsted Keynes

Words and photos by Nigel Currah

This is the first full year for the new flower bed under the running-in board at the South end of platforms 1 and 2. We wanted it to reflect the bright red logo for Railway 200, so planted it with predominantly red-flowering plants, mainly pelargoniums and salvia "Hot Lips". These plants were kindly donated to us by regular Bluebell photographer Phil Horscroft, and they certainly strutted their stuff during the summer. Many thanks to Phil, not only for the generous donation but for the considerable amount of time that he spent nurturing the plants from cuttings and seedlings to maturity.

We saved many of the daffodils and tulips from last spring and will plant them out again when the bedding plants succumb to the lowering

temperatures. The dahlias will be lifted and stored over Winter. Your humble correspondent must admit to giving in to temptation recently at a local garden centre, purchasing some new daffodil bulbs to add to the collection.

On platforms 3 and 4 the "Jewel Bed" as we call it has done well and continues to show great colour even in October. In the next bed, we have recently had to say goodbye to the palm tree which has graced that spot for many years. It was badly damaged in the cold snap in December 2022 and never recovered. Thanks to Matt Crawford and his Infrastructure team for doing this for us. We have saved the alpine plants that grew around the tree and hope to replant them there in the next few weeks.



*The new bed on Platform 1 and 2.*



On a tragic note, we lost one of our steadfast helpers. Richard "Lew" Lewis, who worked at Wakehurst Place and quietly provided great assistance with gardening at HK. Lew passed away suddenly in the Summer. Lew provided many of the daffodil bulbs and all of the bulbs and plants in the bed on platform 5. We now refer to that bed as the "Lew Memorial Bed" and will do our best to keep it looking good in his memory.

This year we have made good contacts with gardeners at Sheffield Park (Barry) and Kingscote (Cathy), and also with charity [Plant Heritage](#), from which we have received free plants for all the stations. We intend to nurture that relationship into the future.

My thanks go to Suzanne and Colin who work much harder in the gardens than I do, regularly watering and dead heading the plants along with the inevitable pruning and weeding to keep the display going as long as possible. Also to Ian Fribbens who keeps the hedges in shape. No mean feat as there is a lot of hedging!

Now we have to plan for next season. Suggestions on a postcard, please! Oh, and those new daffodils – look out for them in the centre of the Jewel Bed in the Spring. I had to buy them – the variety is called "Camelot".



*The "Jewel Bed" still shining even on a wet day.*



# Round and About



**Above:** 'Camelot', with commemorative 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary headboard, proudly flies the Bluebell Flag at the Severn Valley Railway on 19 September. Photo: Nick Gilliam

**Below:** Meanwhile, 'Lady of Legend' was an early arrival for Giants of Steam, and ran a number of Bluebell service trains in late September and early October – seen here on Freshfield Bank, 4 October. Photo: Peter Purdew





# Henry the Collecting Dog

By Tony Hillman

As you probably know the Museum has [London Jack](#) the collecting dog on display. For the past year Henry has been collecting for Woking Homes at Woody Bay station on the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway. Looked after by his owner John he is on duty two or three days a week. I visited in September to meet Henry and John. Henry has collected £4k in just over a year and has become something of a celebrity appearing on local TV. Half the collected money goes to [Woking Homes](#) and half to the [Lynton & Barnstaple Railway](#). John looks the part as a Southern Railwayman with his dog. John has made a replica collecting box for Jack to wear.



**Right:** Henry, owner John and Bluebell Museum deputy curator Tony Hillman at Woody Bay station in North Devon. Photo: Sue Hillman

**Below:** London Jack, now preserved in the Bluebell Railway Museum. Photo: Bluebell Railway Museum



# Carriage Shop Donates £1000

By Chris Wilson, Carriage Shop Volunteer

The Carriage Shop team are pleased to be able to support two Bluebell Railway projects this month.

- £500 to the Southern Railway Coach Group. This money has all be raised from the sales of Matthew Cousin's artwork which has been sold in the Carriage Shop. You can find out more about the Southern Railway Coach Group by visiting: <https://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/sr-coach-group/>.
- £500 to the Bluebell Railway Goods Division. For more information on the work being undertaken by this group and how you can support them visit: visit <https://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk/bluebell/wagon/>.

The Carriage Shop at Horsted Keynes station is open every weekend during October and for additional hours throughout the Giants of Steam weekend.

We currently have a selection of Horsted Keynes exclusive souvenirs, model railway items, railway and transport books and Railway Art by Matthew Cousins. We are also supporting the 1305 Thumper Gang, Bluebell Railway Goods Division and the Fenchurch Fund by stocking a small selection of their items in the shop.

We are in need of donations of Model Railway items, if you can help please get in touch: [bluebellrailwaycarriageshop@gmail.com](mailto:bluebellrailwaycarriageshop@gmail.com)

For our opening times and news please visit our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/BluebellRailwayCarriageShop>



**Top:** Member of the Southern Railway Coach Group

**Bottom:** Members of Bluebell Railway Goods Division team



# Photos From The Museum Website

By Chris Wilson, Bluebell Railway archive volunteer

This month we have added a further 249 images to the Bluebell Railway Museum website bringing the total now available to 28,670.

We have further set of 100 images showing Diesel Multiple Units taken by John Scrace at locations in the Southern, Western and Scottish Regions.

Additionally there are a 149 photographs taken by Joe Kent taken in late 1953 / early 1954 primarily in and around Brighton, Preston Park Pullman Works and Stratford.

Every photograph sale directly helps the Photograph Archive giving us much needed funds to invest in conservation and storage materials. The information needed to pay for orders online by BACS is now included on every order form.

To view and order go to [www.brm-archive.co.uk](http://www.brm-archive.co.uk). There are various searching methods, including by locomotive number or class and location. The content key search allows you to see all the images of a particular type, for example, all the images taken of Pullmans. Use the New key to see all the latest images including those mentioned and shown here.

If you have a collection of photographs, negatives, slides or digital images you are interested in depositing with the Archive and preserving for the future please get in touch with us by emailing [photos@bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk](mailto:photos@bluebell-railway-museum.co.uk).

## Top to Bottom:

BR(S) Class 206 No. 1203 at Edenbridge with the 4.15pm Tonbridge – Reading service. The SER timber building is in process of being demolished. 1 June 1971.

Photo: John Scrace [233223]

BR(S) A1X No. 377S 'Brighton Works' shunting wagons near Preston Park Pullman Car Works, in October 1953.

Photo: Joe Kent [154087]

BR(S) 4-DD Experimental double-decker electric multiple unit No. 4002 on Cliftonville Spur, Preston Park, in October 1953.

Photo: Joe Kent [154123]

BR(S) H2 No. 32421 'South Foreland' at Patcham with northbound van train on 20 December 1953.

Photo: Joe Kent [154178]



# On This Day – 10 October

By Tony Hillman, Deputy Curator

*Pictures from the Bluebell Photographic Archive taken on the 10 October. Thanks to Martin Elms, Richard Peirce, Chris Sutton, Roger Merry-Price and Chris Wilson for finding the pictures and researching the notes*



On Saturday 10 October 1953, diminutive B4 Class 0-4-0T Dock Tank 30094 shunts a long rake of wagons in the Up Sidings and Goods Yard at Winchester City. The B4 was subshedded from Eastleigh to work Duty 345 and stabled each night in the small one road shed located in the goods yard.

The manning arrangements for the engine are quite interesting.

On Monday to Saturday mornings a passed cleaner travelled up from Eastleigh to light up the B4 and prepare it for the local Driver and Fireman. They undertook shunting from 7.45am to 4pm on Monday to Friday when they were relieved by the Eastleigh crew of the freight that paused at Winchester City from 3.24pm to 5.18pm and then signed off duty. The relief crew disposed of the engine and then travelled as passengers back to Eastleigh. On Saturdays with a shorter period of shunting, the local crew disposed of their own engine.

The B4 Class was designed by William Adams for the LSWR and built in two batches of ten, in 1891 and 1893, at Nine Elms Works. 30094 was the last of the first batch. In 1907 Dugald Drummond designed a similar class of five locos. Initially regarded as a new class and built at Nine Elms Works in 1908. In 1912 Robert Urie merged them into the B4 Class.

In October 1953 30094 was allocated to Plymouth Friary (72D), one of a number for working at Cattewater and on the Turnchapel Branch. Possibly a visit to the Works explains why it was working an Eastleigh Duty. Many of the Class worked in Southampton Docks and were named until displaced by the USA tanks from 1947. Thereafter, many were scrapped including 30094, withdrawn in March 1957; some sold for private use and others used elsewhere on similar work. Two survived into preservation, 30096 at the Bluebell Railway and 30102 at Bressingham.

*Photo: Colin Hogg [048031]*





Piggybacking, derived from the term pick packing, possibly describes the actions of the RCTS back in 1954.

On 10 October of that year The Ramblers' Association organised a special excursion to take its members to walk the countryside in the vicinity of Tring, far more rural in those days. By mutual agreement the RCTS took up some hundred tickets of the special in order to get some of its members onto Cheddington in order to join what was called *The Buckinghamshire Rail Tour*.

The ramblers' train, consisting of eight coaches, left Blackfriars at 10.04am behind ex LSWR T9 4-4-0 30729, and was routed via Herne Hill, where this photograph was taken, Streatham Hill, Clapham Junction, the West London line and onto the LMR at Willesden Junction where an additional two coaches were added.

On arrival at Tring at 11.52am the walkers departed leaving the railway enthusiasts to travel to Cheddington to join the rail tour. That consisted of two coaches with 58887, a Webb

0-6-2T 'Coal Tank' built in 1881, as the motive power. After a trip down and back on the Aylesbury High Street branch (closed to passengers in January 1953), the train went to Wolverton for an organised trip around the Carriage Works of nearly three hours, followed by a trip to Newport Pagnell and back (closed to passengers in September 1964). The tour then returned to Bletchley where 30729 was waiting to return to Blackfriars, picking up the presumably tired ramblers at Tring en-route. Arrival back in London was scheduled for 9.14pm.

30729 was built by Dübs & Co., locomotive manufacturers of Glasgow, in December 1899. At the time of the tour, it was allocated to Fratton shed (70F). Moved to Salisbury (72B) in the spring of 1958 it ended its days at Exmouth Junction (72A) working the North Cornwall line to Padstow until withdrawal came in March 1961.

*Photo: Colin Hogg [048237]*



On Sunday 10 October 1965, '3H' diesel electric multiple unit (DEMU) 1113 pauses at Southwater with the 10.30am Horsham to Brighton service. The photograph, taken by John Scrace, captures the station in its last year. Having been listed in the Beeching Report, it would finally close just over six months later, on 7 March 1966.

Southwater, in West Sussex, had been opened by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSCR) more than a hundred years earlier on 16 September 1861. It was located on the Steyning Line, a twenty-mile branch that ran from Horsham to Shoreham-by-Sea. Also known as the Adur Valley Line, it left the main Arundel line at Itchingfield Junction, near Christ's Hospital and, as well as rural communities, served local industries including Southwater Brickworks.

1113 was one of an initial batch of eighteen two-car DEMUs constructed at Eastleigh in 1957. Aimed at dieselising services in Hampshire, they were given the classification '2H'. Each unit initially consisted of a motor brake second (MBS) and a driving trailer composite. (DTC). Later they

were strengthened with a trailer second (TS) to become '3H'. The 'V' on the front of the unit in the photograph was orange and a way of indicating to staff that the brake van was at that end of the unit.

Although some units, later reclassified Class 205, remained in service until late 2004, 1113 was not one of them. It was involved in a collision at Battersea Park in 1985 with two coaches being scrapped and a third ending up being partnered with two Class 202 vehicles to become Class 206 (206101) but served only until 1987. Two coaches of the very first 2H unit, 1101, are now preserved at the East Kent Railway.

Although Southwater station has been demolished and the site covered with housing development, the southern section of the 'Downs Link' long distance footpath which links Guildford with Shoreham follows the track bed of the old Steyning Line.

*Photo: John Scrace [233045]*





Photo: Alfie Thomas / @72b.photography



## Tail Lamp

If you've enjoyed this issue of *The Bluebell Times*, feel free to pass it on to other people you think might also want to read it.

To find out when the next issue is out and for other updates about the Bluebell Railway, check our [website](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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